



# A guide to charcot foot

## Podiatry Service

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### What is a charcot foot?

Charcot foot is a sudden softening of the bones in the foot that can occur in people who have significant nerve damage (neuropathy). The bones are weakened enough to fracture, and with continued walking the foot will eventually change shape. As the disorder progresses, the foot can change shape significantly, making it very difficult to walk and ulcers can occur at pressure points.



### What causes charcot foot?

Charcot foot develops as a result of neuropathy, which decreases sensation and the ability to feel temperature, pain or trauma. When Neuropathy is severe, there is a total lack of feeling in the feet. Because of Neuropathy, the pain of injury goes unnoticed and the person continues to walk - making the injury worse.

### What are the symptoms of charcot foot?

The first signs of charcot foot are that the affected foot suddenly becomes swollen and warmer than the other foot with possible redness. There may be some discomfort on walking although this is not always the case.

### Diagnosis of charcot foot

Early diagnosis of charcot foot is extremely important for successful treatment. To arrive at an initial diagnosis close examination of the foot and ankle and questions about events that may have occurred prior to the symptoms are required. X-rays are also essential for diagnosis. In some cases other imaging studies and lab tests may also be ordered. Once treatment begins, X-rays are taken periodically to aid in evaluating the status of the condition.

**Charcot foot is a very serious condition that can lead to severe deformity, disability and even amputation. Because of its seriousness, it is important that patients with diabetes, a disease often associated with neuropathy, seek immediate care if signs or symptoms appear.**

### What is the treatment for charcot foot?

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The aim of any treatment is to prevent further joint destruction and reduce foot deformity. This will consist of:

## Immobilisation

Because the foot and ankle are so fragile during the early stage of charcot they must be protected so the soft bones can repair themselves. Complete non-weight bearing is necessary to keep the foot from further collapsing. During this period you will be fitted with a cast or removable boot and may be required to use crutches or a wheelchair. It commonly takes the bone **12-18 months** to heal.

## Activity modification

A modification in activity level may be needed to avoid repetitive trauma to both feet. Rest is important not only because it reduces the trauma to the foot, but the other foot is also at risk. Although rare, you could develop a second charcot, so measures must be taken to protect both feet.

## Custom shoes

Shoes with special inserts may be needed after the bones have healed, to enable you to return you to your daily activities, as well as help prevent recurrence of charcot foot and the development of ulcers on pressure points. Bracing or bespoke shoes may be required in cases with significant deformity.

## What can you do to help charcot foot?

If you have a charcot foot it is important that you **avoid weight bearing as much as possible**. This is achieved by wearing a boot or plaster cast. Close monitoring of both feet is important and seek immediate advice if rubbing, blisters or wounds occur on either foot.